

[Art Botsford Speaking]

F/Donovan, Thomaston

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Art Botsford speaking:

“Now I got a letter here just the other day — I'll tell you about it — used to be a couple of fellows work here named Daniels — twins they was — Nathan and Elnathan — Nathan came up to town visiting not long ago and I met him while he was waitin' for his bus — he lives down in New Haven now — and I says to him: `Get in my car. I'll get you down in time for your bus.'

“So I took him all around town, up through High street and Walnut street where he could look around and see how the town has grown, showed him all that new development up off High street. He couldn't get over it, said the town sure had changed since the days he worked in the clock shop. town sure had changed since the days he worked in the clock shop.

“Well we got talkin' about the old days and Nathan said he was goin' to send me something [?] about the clock shop — I thought 'twas a book, the way he talked, but it was this here newspaper clipping. Ain't much about Seth Thomas clocks except what you'll find in the early records — how Eli Terry started the business and Seth took it over — but here's something should interest you —” (Reads from the clipping:)

“In the early days of the clock industry, they were sold entirely by peddlers who traveled over the country —”

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“That's something that probably is not known by everybody. Tell you something else — I remember hearing the old timers say that wooden clocks were not the first kind manufactured in this country — that over in York state somewhere they made brass clocks even before Seth Thomas —

“And say, I'm going to tell you a story came to my mind after you left, when we was talkin' about Hitler, but if you use my name with it, and it comes out in print, I'll shut down on you, I won't tell you another thing, remember that. I thought of a sayin' of my grandmother's: she used to say `There's Atwoods and there's ATWOODS!' Get what I mean? `Twas the way she said it.

“And that brought this story to mind. I heard it I don't know how many years ago at a big gatherin' in Woodbury.

“Wisht I could tell it like I heard it told — the feller made a long story out of it. Seems that years ago in the early days of Connecticut, a lot of people heard about the Pomperaug Valley, and a big bunch of them decided they wanted to settle there.

“Well, they stocked up with provisions and all they needed, and they got some [?] Indians to guide `em and a good supply of fire water, and they set out.

“They traveled and traveled, and they ate up all their food, and they ran out of fire water, and they got impatient. So they called the Indians into conference and asked them how long it was going to take to reach the [?]x Pomperaug. And the Indians said, `Pretty soon, now.'

“Well, they traveled and traveled some more and at last when they'd just about give up hope, they came to the top of a high [?] hill and the Indians pointed down and said there it is, there's the Ox Pomperaug.

“So the Atwoods hollered: `Let's fight!'

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"And the Skiltons said: "Let's pray.'

'And the Miners said: `Let's have a drink!'

"And the feller said they been doin' it ever since. And whenever you find anyone in court in [?] Woodbury for fightin' or drinkin' its a [?] Miner or an Atwood, while the Skiltons have always had more than ordinary prayin' ability.

"But now don't you dare use my [?] name with that story, and if it gets into print you better leave the state, or some of them people will scalp you, for there's still plenty of 'em left over around there.

"I don't know when I heard it, back in '88 I guess, or the winter of '87. Now I told you about that clock went to the South Pole on the Byrd expedition. They left it there and when they came back the second time, they wound it up and it started going just like the day it left the factory. It was one of their ordinary eight day movements, not too expensive

"I got something here I want to show you." Mr. Botsford brings out a huge, bound file of ancient newspapers. Dates of the issue are all in the [?] eighteen fifties, and in themselves the old papers furnish [?] a vivid picture of the life of their period. "Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion," reads the ornate masthead. Mr Botsford says his father bought the file from a man who wished to dispose of it, but that previously, the family had subscribed to the weekly for years. [?] [?] The arrival of the paper each week was an eagerly awaited event. Interspersed in the yellowing pages, are a few of Mr Botsford's own clippings, collected through the years.

"Here's on of the C. L Russell post, GAR," he says, unfolding an old [rotogravure?] sheet [?] of the Waterbury Sunday Republican. The picture was taken in the eighties, showing the post at almost full strength and the veterans are a sturdy, handsome, though bewhiskered group, resplendent in dress uniform

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"They played an important part in town affairs, sure they did. Just as important then as the Legion is now." He turns a few pages. "You've heard of the famous Franklin Rebus." Points to a large sheet, illustrated with woodcuts, a likeness of Benjamin Franklin at the top of the page — the title: "The Art of Making Money Plenty in Every Man's Pocket," by Dr Franklin. Mr Botsford reads the rebus.

He turns a few more pages, brings out an old theater program dated eighteen seventy something. "This was a big event at the time," he says. Said the program: "The Young Ladies of the Community will present several tableaux Thursday evening, March 17, at American hall."

"American hall, that's the telephone building. It'll give you an idea just how old [?] this thing is when I tell you that Mrs.[md] she's an old lady today, you know, she was the youngest girl in the whole show — just a [?] little kid.

"But they used to have good shows at the old Opera House They had companies come here from New York, and they say one time right on the New York stage, the question was asked where [?] was the best theater this certain actor had ever played in, and he answered for acoustics, the Opera House at Thomaston Connecticut.

"I see Pat Rooney there, and Denman, and other big actors of their day. I saw East [?] Lynne, and other famous old plays there. And once that had a fire engine and four horses right up there on the stage.

"There's [?] lots of things I can't remember. I got a good memory, but there's a lot of things I forget, [?] same's anyone else. Just like yourself, you see the new post office goin' up down town, and the new high school, and it probably never occurs to you to save records of it and newspaper clippings and such though forty-fifty years from now, if [?] you're alive, they'll be in demand.

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“But some things stick in my mind, where they might be forgotten by other [?] people, because they impress me more. You walk into a shop and you see an old machine, and to you its just a machine and you don't notice it twice, but to me, it may be something I've worked a [?] lifetime on and I know every bolt and nut on it by heart, see what I mean?”